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ABSTRACT

This study examined inservice teachers' perceptions of classroom assessment, standardized testing, and alternative assessment methods. Participants were 168 predominantly white, predominantly female teachers working on master's degrees at Eastern Michigan University and the Citadel. During the fall of 1997, they completed a questionnaire that asked about: (1) demographics, (2) personal experiences with standardized testing, (3) personal experiences with classroom assessment, (4) current views on standardized testing, (5) current views on classroom assessment, and (6) current views on alternative assessment. Data analysis indicated that teachers tended to be more positive about classroom assessment than standardized testing. This was true for their personal and professional experiences. Past personal experiences with educational assessment and current views of assessment were highly interrelated. However, those who saw value in standardized testing tended to see less value in alternative forms of assessment. (Contains 11 references.) (SM)

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Inservice Teachers' Perceptions of Educational Assessment

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Introduction

As educational reforms take place in schools across the United States, the purposes and products of educational assessment are changing at a rapid pace. This paper examines current inservice teachers' perceptions of classroom assessment, standardized testing, and alternative assessment methods. Alternative assessment methods were included in this study due to the increased frequency with which they are being used in educational settings. Based on the assumption that teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and personal educational experiences influence their practice (Calderhead, 1996), we posited the following research questions:

Question One

How do teachers perceive educational assessment from the perspective of a student (past experiences) and from the perspective of a teacher (current experiences)? The intent of this question was to simply describe teachers' perceptions. Descriptive statistics were used to answer this question.

Question Two

Are there relationships between teachers' past experiences with assessment (student perspective) and professional experiences with assessment (teacher perspective)? The intent of the second question was to establish relationships between past and present experiences with educational assessment. While these relationships have been suggested in previous studies (e.g., Green, 1992), there has not always been data to support them. Correlations were used to answer this question.

Review of the Literature

Teachers' Perceptions of Educational Assessment

The first large-scale, documented efforts to measure teachers' perceptions of educational assessment began in the late 1960s (Goslin, 1967), perhaps in response to the increased use of standardized tests in the schools. Since that time, various researchers have attempted to gauge teachers' attitudes toward assessment in many different ways. Studying teachers' attitudes toward assessment is important to the educational measurement community in the sense that it provides an indication of how tests are being used or misused (Rudner, 1980) and what can be done to improve standardized and classroom testing.

The literature on teachers' attitudes toward assessment can best be described as a mixed bag. Research on teachers' attitudes has suggested more negative attitudes toward standardized testing than positive attitudes. This may be a reflection of several factors that researchers have identified as influences on teachers' perceptions of standardized testing. Most teachers have a good deal of faith in their own classroom assessments. Many teachers have great faith in their personal judgements and observations, even when the observations are not systematic and the judgements are not always based on explicit criteria (Lazar-Morrison, Polin, Moy, & Burry, 1980).

Goslin (1967) collected data from a sample of 1,450 teachers nationwide. In general, teachers reported satisfaction with the number of tests administered in the schools, as well as how the test results were used by teachers and administrators. Similarly, Beck (1980) surveyed 3,300 teachers whose classes took part in the standardization for the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT) in the spring of 1978. Teachers and students were asked about their opinions of

achievement tests in general, after the tests were administered. Sixty-nine percent of the teachers reported that the amount of standardized testing in their school was "about right."

When asked about the validity of standardized achievement tests, 16% of the teachers in the Beck (1980) study reported that standardized tests were valid, 72% were uncertain while 12% reported that the tests were generally invalid. When asked if they were supportive of the use of standardized tests, 32% of the teachers surveyed were supportive, 63% were neutral, and 5% did not support standardized test use. Beck, who worked for the company that creates and sells the MAT, concluded that teachers were calm, comfortable, knowledgeable, and mostly supportive of standardized testing. It is not clear from his data that these conclusions were warranted. A closer look at the results indicates that a majority of teachers chose "uncertain" or "neutral" points on the semantic differential scales when asked about the importance of standardized testing. Another interpretation of Beck's data may be that teachers were ambivalent about standardized testing at that time.

More recently, Kathy Green of the University of Denver initiated a line of research relating teachers' attitudes toward assessment and assessment training. This research sought variables that are related to positive attitudes toward assessment and the use of quality assessment practices. Green's research also was the first to use rating scale scores as indicators of teachers' attitudes toward assessment rather than individual questionnaire items. As such, it represented the conceptualization of teachers' attitudes toward assessment as a construct, rather than a collection of individual questions about testing.

In the initial study, Green and Stager (1986) surveyed over 500 teachers in the state of Wyoming about their attitudes toward both classroom assessment and standardized testing. Four important findings resulted from this study. First, teachers who reported having more coursework

in assessment and evaluation did not necessarily report more positive attitudes toward classroom or standardized testing. Second, teachers who had positive experiences in their personal past with evaluation tended to be more positive about assessment in general. Third, male teachers tended to have more favorable attitudes toward assessment than female teachers did. Finally, Green and Stager found that teachers from higher grade levels reported more positive views of classroom testing than teachers from lower grade levels.

Using the same data set, Green and Stager (1987) explored the relationship between measurement practices, training, and attitudes toward assessment in the classroom. Several important results came from this study. First, the amount of training in testing and measurement a teacher receives was not related to the frequency of test use. Second, those teachers who engaged in "quality" measurement practices (e.g., testing that is based on instructional objectives, immediate feedback, etc.) tended to find their testing and measurement coursework to be worthwhile (e.g., demonstrate positive attitudes toward testing). Third, male teachers tended to have more positive attitudes toward assessment, especially regarding test fairness and test effectiveness. The authors concluded that, because "quality" practices were positively related to measurement training and that teachers tend to spend the same amount of time on testing regardless of how much training they have received, many teachers put their tests to less than optimal use. Researchers have long suggested that training is essential to both appropriate test use and positive attitudes toward testing. In fact, Yeh (1980) found that teachers who reported having training in testing and measurement tended to use standardized test results for classroom decisions more frequently than non-trained teachers. The Green and Stager study suggested that there might be a relationship between training, appropriate test use, and positive attitudes toward

testing, thus lending credence to the notion that quality training in testing and measurement is important.

The final study by Green (1992) involved the same data set from the earlier studies, as well as additional data collected from preservice teachers. This time the research questions revolved around expected differences in opinions between inservice and preservice teachers. Preservice teachers with measurement training tended to believe that standardized tests address important educational outcomes, while believing that classroom tests are less useful. Inservice teachers believed that standardized tests are important, but not to the degree that preservice teachers did. Inservice teachers also had more credence in classroom testing than preservice teachers. This finding was replicated by Impara, Plake, and Fager (1993), who found that inservice teachers tended to be more positive about their classroom tests than standardized tests.

Green (1992) suggested that the differences in opinion between preservice and inservice teachers had to do with teaching experience. Because of the differences in opinion between inservice and preservice teachers, Green also suggested that significant efforts be made to develop more inservice training programs for teachers. Indeed, 84.6% of the teachers who responded to Impara et al. (1993) survey were interested in more training in testing and measurement.

A more recent survey by Herman and Golan (1993) indicates that teachers are feeling increased pressure to improve standardized test scores. While these teachers reported general satisfaction with their jobs, most reported somewhat negative attitudes toward standardized testing. Specifically, many teachers in the Herman and Golan study reported that they were not sure if standardized tests help improve schools, clarify learning goals, or provide instructional/curricular feedback as they were expected to do. Negative attitudes seemed to be

strongest among teachers in schools with students from lower socio-economic homes. The pressure that arises through the use of standardized test results for accountability purposes has been documented by others as well (Madaus, West, Harmon, Lomax, & Viator, 1992).

Classroom Assessments

While inservice teachers generally are positive about the assessments they use in their classrooms on a regular basis, many admit to their shortcomings in using classroom assessments in an optimal fashion. That is, many teachers admit that their training in testing and measurement is somewhat deficient.

Marso and Pigge (1993) have come to the conclusion that many teachers find testing, evaluation, and grading activities to be among their more demanding and least pleasant classroom responsibilities. The act of evaluation requires the teacher to render value judgements and at the same time defend her/his grading and evaluation system. A teacher can avoid possible confrontations by creating vague assessment targets and/or being very lenient with grading. Neither of these approaches is in the best interest of the student.

Focus of the Study

Teachers' perceptions of educational assessment have been documented in various ways. Neither their perceptions of alternative assessment, nor their personal experiences with specific forms of assessment (as students) have been studied. We sought to make this the focus of the current study.

Method

Participants

Participants were teachers working on master's-level degrees at Eastern Michigan University and The Citadel. All participants volunteered their participation in this study during the fall of 1997. Of the 168 participants, 127 (75.6 %) were females. One hundred-sixty participants (95.2%) identified their ethnicity as white, while five (3%) were Black, one (.6%) was Hispanic, and two (1.2%) were multi-ethnic. Most of the teachers (42%) came from elementary settings while the remaining teachers (58%) came from secondary settings. Interestingly, most of teachers (85.7%) reported taking a class that had tests and measurements as a major focus.

Procedure

A questionnaire was developed in order to collect data for this study. The first section of the questionnaire included demographic information to help us describe our sample. The remaining five sections, consisting of 5 – 10 questions each, were devoted to measuring: (1) personal experiences with standardized testing, (2) personal experiences with classroom assessment, (3) current views on standardized testing, (4) current views on classroom assessment, and (5) current views on alternative assessment. While not exhaustive, the five (Likert-type) scales asked general questions about standardized testing, classroom assessment, and alternative assessment methods. Questions for the current views on standardized testing scale and the current views on classroom assessment scale were developed by Kathy Green (Green & Stager, 1986; Green & Stager, 1987). We revised some of Green's questions for use on our questionnaire.

Teachers were given the data collection instrument during their graduate class and asked to return it within one week. Thus, teachers responded to the questions on their own time.

Analysis

The first question was answered with descriptive statistics (e.g., mean and standard deviation) for the five scales. While each scale contained a different number of items, each item took on a value from 1 to 6, where higher scores indicated more positive attitudes and lower scores indicated more negative attitudes. The second question was answered with Pearson Product-Moment correlations between the five scales.

Results

Reliability

Coefficient alpha for the five scales ranged from .78 - .86. Thus, we were reasonably certain that the scale scores were stable enough to consider useful in the analyses.

Question One

Teachers were most positive about their own personal experiences with classroom assessment (M = 4.50), followed by current views of alternative assessment (M = 4.10), and current views of classroom assessment (M = 3.87). They were most negative about current views of standardized testing (M = 2.56) and personal experiences with standardized testing (M = 3.34). Additionally, teachers were most similar on their current views of classroom assessment (SD = .68) and least similar in their personal experiences with standardized testing (SD = .98).

Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics: Teachers' Perceptions of Educational Assessment

Scale Description	Item Mean	Item Standard Deviation	Scale Mean	Scale Standard Deviation
Personal Experiences with Standardized Testing	3.34	.98	23.37	6.85
Personal Experiences with Classroom Assessment	4.50	.71	27.02	4.23
Current Views on Standardized Testing	2.56	.83	20.51	6.68
Current Views on Classroom Assessment	3.87	.68	38.71	6.85
Current Views on Alternative Assessment	4.10	.82	24.65	4.91

Question Two

All correlations were statistically significant at the 5% error level for the two-tailed null hypothesis that each individual correlation was 0. Most correlations were also statistically significant at the 1% error level. In general, teachers who reported positive personal experiences with educational assessment tended to have positive views of all forms of assessment for the children they currently teach. Specifically, teachers who reported positive personal experiences with standardized testing tended to find more value in standardized testing than their colleagues ($r = .55$, $p < .01$). Notably, all of the correlations with current views of alternative assessment were negative. In effect, teachers who were positive about standardized testing and classroom assessment tended to be more negative about the use of alternative forms of assessment (e.g., portfolios, performance assessments).

Table 2.

Intercorrelations of Teachers' Perceptions of Educational Assessment

	Personal Experiences with Standardized Testing	Personal Experiences with Classroom Assessment	Current Views on Standardized Testing	Current Views on Classroom Assessment
Personal Experiences with Classroom Assess.	.25			
Current Views on Standardized Testing	.55	.19		
Current Views on Classroom Assessment	.26	.47	.41	
Current Views on Alternative Assessment	- .41	- .16	- .49	-.42

Discussion

Question One

How do teachers perceive educational assessment from the perspective of a student (past experiences) and from the perspective of a teacher (current experiences)?

Consistent with previous survey research, inservice teachers tended to be more positive about classroom assessment than standardized testing. This was true for teachers' personal as well as professional experiences with these different forms of assessment. Given that teachers have some control over many forms of classroom assessment and alternative assessment, it is not surprising that theses methods are held in higher esteem.

Question Two

Are there relationships between teachers' past experiences with assessment (student perspective) and professional experiences with assessment (teacher perspective)?

Past personal experiences with educational assessment and current views of assessment were highly interrelated. However, those who saw value in standardized testing tended to see less value in alternative forms of assessment. Indeed, teachers who had positive experiences with standardized testing and classroom assessment tended to be more wary of alternative forms of assessment.

These results have some implications for inservice training in the area of educational assessment. First, teachers with negative experiences in classroom assessment and standardized testing are least likely to see value in various forms of assessment for their classroom. Thus, inservice training might focus on helping teachers see the value in assessment methods rather than just "how to" do assessment. Second, if school districts are using portfolio assessment or other alternative assessment methods, they need to know that many teachers don't see as much value in these methods, at least as they currently understand these methods. Part of the process of developing an assessment system that incorporates portfolios is developing a culture in which that form of assessment is valued. This is true of most any educational innovation. Teachers must see value in it if they are to buy into it.

Teachers' perceptions of educational assessment are varied. Inservice training may need to address these perceptions from the outset. Perhaps personal experiences with various forms of educational assessment could serve as a vehicle for understanding how various assessment practice can be used (and misused). Nonetheless, teachers, in general, tend to see value in various forms of assessment. The next step is to make certain that they are using this information to benefit the children in their charge.

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